

rainbows and debris by mileven

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Genre: and mike stops being an ass, the el and max friendship we deserve, this is basically half plot/half the party just being weird

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Summary:

in which el and mike accept max into the party

rainbows and debris

With an arm thrown over her eyes to shield her vision from the sun, Max was standing outside of the middle school building waiting for the boys to get out of class. The final bell had rung ten minutes ago, and yet they were nowhere to be seen.

Tapping her foot on her skateboard, Max quickly glanced over at the high school parking lot in search of her step-brother Billy.

After Max threatened Billy last November, she'd been very determined to maintain the distance she'd created between the two of them. They still carpooled to school in the morning, but she'd told him and her mom that she'd joined a sports team as the manager. This, of course, wasn't true — unless riding her skateboard around with the boys as they all rode their bikes counted as 'sports managing'. But the false practice times she came up with kept her from being alone with him after school, and as manager, her mom would never ask to come to a game. Max wanted absolutely nothing to do with Billy if she could help it, which was why she needed to *leave* before he saw her outside and not with a sport's team.

"Shit," she whispered, chuckling quietly to herself. She spotted him alone next to his *beloved* car, which, he still had no idea she'd stolen last year. He was always alone nowadays and she didn't feel a shred of sympathy for the motherfucker. Once Steve Harrington came back to school single, and badly beaten up by none other than Billy himself, nobody wanted anything to do with him. It's what he deserved, anyway.

Max's eyes widened in realization that she was looking at Billy and she needed to leave before he noticed her. "*Shit!*" She whispered before silently apologizing to the boys and kicking her foot off the pavement.

Visiting El was something that only happened on occasion. They were to never go up to the cabin as a group, and if they did, they were to go to the police station and wait for Hopper to take them himself. He said it was too suspicious for five kids to be continuously going into the woods alone, and if they did it too often or routinely, someone

was sure to track their pattern. So they went by themselves or in pairs of two. But the day seemed to have other plans in store for Max.

Max could only think about two things as she rode to the cabin. Number one, how pissed off Hopper was going to be when she showed up without meeting him at the police station first, and number two, how upset El was going to be when she saw that it was just her and not the boys. Hers and El's relationship never ended up progressing much past the skateboard incident in the gymnasium or what had happened when Max tried to introduce herself, causing so *much* awkward tension that Max had only visited the cabin twice in the last six months. The first time was with Dustin, and all they did was listen to Madonna for three hours while Max sat and did homework.

Pushing herself to the edge of the woods with the sun still in her god damn eyes, Max swung her backpack to the front of her body and snatched the pair of sunglasses hanging off the handle before quickly putting the bag back in place on her right shoulder.

During a visit with Steve one day, Max kept falling off her skateboard and cursing the stupid red vision the sun gave her when it got into her eyes. She had been trying to teach him how to skateboard, but all she was doing was teaching him how to fall down and break his legs. Steve watched her struggle in silence before taking his own pair of rectangular sunglasses out of his backpack and handing them to her with a sour look on his face.

"The sun is really harmful for light eyes like yours, so put these on. And keep these with you. I better see you wearing them every time I'm around and the sun is out." He'd said. She liked Steve.

Max put the black sunglasses on over her eyes, looking around for anyone who might be watching just as she reached the trees that eventually lead to the cabin. Deciding that the coast was clear, she tucked her skateboard into her side and rummaged around in her backpack for her compass once she was hidden from sight inside the greenery. She'd never visited El alone before, and had never planned to, but she knew that Hopper and El were no Hansel and Gretel. Any breadcrumbs or markers on trees leading to the cabin were too risky and, most of all, stupid.

After following the directions she'd gotten from the boys for about 15 minutes, Max could make out the shape of Hopper's chimney through the branches of a tree. Letting out a sigh of relief, she put the compass in her hoodie pocket and began walking. It wasn't long before she felt something dig into her shin and force her to fall over onto her stomach, causing a loud smack to echo through the trees.

"Shit, shit, shit. *Shit.*" she whispered, staying low on the ground for a minute. She could feel the lower half of her leg throbbing, but chose to ignore it for the time being.

"Max, is it?" She heard Hopper's monotone voice from right above her, making her jump. She looked up to see him with a hand on the holster of his gun.

"Uh, yep," Max swallowed nervously before averting her eyes to the feet that were in her line of vision.

"Get up, kid," Hopper said, grabbing onto Max's upper arm and hoisting her to her feet. "You were supposed to meet me at the police station with the others."

"They never showed up, sir, and I saw my step-brother so I left before he saw me...sir," Her eyebrows drew together in annoyance at how often she was calling him sir, and rolled her eyes. She continued walking behind him and tried not to step on anything that might crack.

Hopper nodded, "That's okay. Did anyone see you come up here?"

"Not that I could see," She shrugged, "No cars followed me and I looked around before entering."

The two remained silent on their way up the stairs. Max noticed El watching her from the window and offered her a small awkward smile before hearing the locks on the doors start to ease up. Max jumped in surprise, forgetting that El had the ability to do things like unlock doors from seven feet away. She wasn't around El enough to really digest it, and doubted that she ever would be in order to get used to it.

Hopper and Max walked through the door as it swung open, revealing El, who was now slowly walking over to them.

Max set her backpack down by the front door. "Should I take off my shoes?" She asked politely, looking around.

Hopper let out a snort, "No. In fact, you better leave them on." El laughed at that, too.

Max's head whipped toward the noise, having never heard Eleven laugh at anything. She met the short girl's amused gaze and watched as it wandered down to her shin, landing on the blood leaking through Max's jeans. El hit Hopper in the arm and pointed to the stain.

"You're bleeding, kid," Hopper said, taking off his hat and hanging it on a hook by the door. "El, go get the cleaning supplies. I'm gonna go reset the trip wire," He pointed toward the door as he spoke before disappearing into the heat of what was soon to be summer.

Max looked down at the blood soaking through her jeans and cringed at the sight. She bent down and rolled her pant leg up with a groan, cursing at her now stained clothes. "At least it's not my period," She joked.

El's eyebrows scrunched together at the taller girl's words and sighed, taking Max by the hand and pushing her gently to sit on the couch. She went into the kitchen and doused a wash cloth in cool water and soap, handing it to Max afterwards.

Max slowly took the towel from El's hands, "Is Hopper going to be mad if this gets stained?"

"No. This is what he does when I bleed." El said, pointing to her nose.

Max nodded and pressed the wet towel to the open wound on her shin, wincing at the somewhat painful feeling of the texture of the towel and soap rubbing against her open wound. She continued applying pressure as she watched El grab a paper towel and a large bandaid from the bathroom.

“When your leg is dry, we’ll put this on.” El said, showing her the bandaid and sitting down next to Max on the couch.

Max only nodded, unsure of what to do now that she was here. “Sorry I’m here and not the boys. I was supposed to visit you with them, not by myself, and I guess I just got here earlier than they could, which is surprising.” She bit the inside of her cheek, “It would’ve been nice if the trip wire had come up in the directions. I mean, they wrote them in code, so I get it if they didn’t want to put any details in writing but I mean seriously—”

“They aren’t coming,” El said, brows furrowed.

“Huh?” Max narrowed her eyes and halted the hand applying pressure to her wound.

“I mean, not yet anyway. Later. They have an AV Club meeting,” El clarified, bringing her legs up to cross on the couch.

“Oh shit,” Max slumped back on the seat. “I completely forgot. I love those meetings!” She threw her arms up and let them fall by her sides on the couch cushion.

She knew it was wrong, and she’d never say it out loud — except maybe to Mike —, but El felt kind of glad that Max had forgotten about the AV club meeting. This feeling was something that El had only recently discovered was called jealousy, learning the word when she’d talked to Mike about what had happened last November in the gymnasium with Max and her skateboard. Mike had assured her that there was absolutely nothing going on between him and Max or anyone else, and told her gently that she didn’t need to trip other girls who talked to him. El didn’t understand that.

“I didn’t trip Max out of jealousy over you. I did it because she was there, and I wasn’t.” She’d explained, shifting so that she faced him from where they sat on the top step of the cabin’s stairwell.

“Is that... not the same thing?” Mike had asked.

“Different. I didn’t think she was taking you from me. I was... jealous... of her for being able to be there at all.”

Mike had understood, but he offered to help her work on her impulse control anyway.

“What do you do in AV club?” El asked, interested to know what her friends did in their spare time.

As she awaited Max’s response, El took the leg with the wound that Max was neglecting to care for and put it in her lap, cleaning up the blood around the cut.

“That’s okay, Eleven, I can do that.” Max began to sit up and reach for the towel but El pulled it back before she could take it.

“Maybe you can, but you weren’t,” El said, applying pressure now.

“Okay,” Max winced when El pressed a little too hard on a particularly tender spot. “Well, AV stands for audiovisuals, so we help teachers with their projectors or with the speakers in the auditorium when there’s a play or an announcement. Stuff like that.”

“A play?” El asked.

“Yeah, like... kind of like the soap operas the boys say you like. There’s a drama class at school where students get to act out other plays and movies.” El’s eyes lit up at that. “There’s usually music involved. It’s kind of cool, actually.”

“I want to be in drama class.” El stated, halting her movements on cleaning Max’s injury.

Max smiled, “I can swipe you a brochure from the high school if you want. Their productions are a lot bigger.” El nodded eagerly and Max made a mental note to sneak into the high school the next day after Billy was gone.

“So, about AV club. Not just anyone is allowed in the AV room, which makes it feel all exclusive and whatever,” Max chuckled. “It’s not that special, but it feels special because of the boys, I guess. Sometimes we just talk about DnD, or about what happened last year. They talk about you a lot,” El smiled faintly, eyes cast down as she tended to Max’s leg, “but a lot of the time, we talk about how we’re feeling. Everything might seemingly be over, but it never is. There

are always repercussions.”

“Repercussions?” El asks, taking the paper towel and dabbing the left over wetness from the towel.

“Yeah, like the aftermath. You know, what happens after a storm. Except for us, there’s no rainbow, only debris.” Max said, wrapping her arms around herself. El nodded like she understood this well.

“We can have some rainbows,” El said, picking up the bandaid and tearing the package open to reveal a bright rainbow bandage.

Max raised her eyebrows, “I guess we can,” she said with a grin, watching as El placed the bandaid over her wound and smoothed out the edges.

“I’m sorry about before,” El murmured, her expression hardening, “with the skateboard. And when I ignored you. I don’t want to be a debris, I want to be a rainbow.”

Max frowned, her leg still in El’s lap, “I always thought you sounded awesome, Eleven. I was a little jealous of just how awesome the boys made you sound, but my intentions were always to be your friend.”

El nodded, having already known that Max only wanted to be her friend due to an intense conversation with Lucas. She’d never done anything except be nice to her, and even to Mike when neither of them had been welcoming. ‘Friend’ was not a term that El used or took lightly. A friend to her was sacred — someone she cared for and someone who cared for her.

“I was a little jealous of you, too, and that’s why I did those things. But it was stupid. I would never want to hurt my friend, and I’m sorry for that now.” El said earnestly.

Max had never known someone her age to say things with such intensity before. She only knew an inkling of what Eleven’s life had been like before she’d met the boys, and she figured that nobody knew much more than she did except for Mike and Hopper, but she felt safe in assuming that nothing about her life felt casual for El. She made these promises because she cherished her friends and what they

provided for her when she needed it, and in return they cherished her.

Max's mouth twitched, curving into a half smile, "Does that mean we're friends?"

El nodded, taking Max's hand into her own, "Friends."

—

Hopper left to go back to work two hours before the boys arrived, and in the meantime Max and Eleven spilled secrets and feelings to each other that they hadn't even realized they were holding in. They'd never noticed the boundaries they'd kept between themselves and the boys before, but they recognized the difference through talking to each other.

El confided in Max about her love of drama and romance. Films, tv shows, music, etc. — She loved all of it. Max was indifferent, more into sci-fi than anything, but she was happy that El trusted her enough to tell her something she didn't want the boys to know. And as they discussed Max's interests, she told El something she'd never told the boys in return. To Max's delight, El didn't even know what she meant and didn't judge her for it when Max told her that she was a secret trekkie.

"It's not that I don't like Star Wars because I do. I love Star Wars. But Star Trek is something I've been watching with my dad since I was literally like five, you know?" Max exclaimed.

El didn't really know, but she was beginning to, so she nodded along with everything Max said anyway.

"Just don't tell the boys, okay? Especially not Lucas — he can never know. Promise?" Max said as if it was life or death, and held out a pinky for El to shake with her own.

El narrowed her eyes in confusion at Max's pinky and began to hesitantly raise her own when she pulled it back before they could shake, *"Lucas wouldn't care, Max. Why do you care what he thinks?"*

El got her answer when Max's cheeks turned almost as red as her hair

and she immediately wrapped her pinky around the other girl's.
"Never mind. I promise."

It was then, while Max was going on and on about Star Trek and 'going where no man has gone before', that Lucas, Dustin, Will, and Mike walked up the cabin steps together and knocked on the door.

Max and El jumped in surprise, clearly startled by the sudden appearance of the four boys. They'd been so wrapped up in their conversation that they'd forgotten the boys were coming at all.

"Should we open it?" Max whispered, her wounded leg still on El's lap.

El crinkled her nose with a nod, "We'll continue talking later."

The locks on the door eased with a single thought from El, and the boys began shuffling in, immediately spotting the two girls on the couch. They all exchanged confused glances.

"Wow, you're in the same room and neither of you are dead... that's crazy." Dustin said, taking off his backpack and holding it in his hands.

All four boys noticed the weird position they were in, with Max's leg still propped up on El's lap, but Mike was the first to notice the bloody towel and rainbow bandaid on Max's shin. He subtly tried to get El's attention, shifting up and down on his feet until she looked at him. Once her eyes met his, he flicked his eyes down towards the band-aid and up to meet her gaze again, asking her a silent question.
You didn't do that did you?

El's heart leapt in her chest, shaking her head with wide eyes before looking at the three other boys and spitting out a quick explanation,
"Um, Max fell."

Max raised an eyebrow and turned her head toward the four boys,
"More like I tripped. None of you shits told me there was a *trip wire*."

"I don't think any of us expected you to come here on your own," Will shrugged, defending his friends.

“Touché,” Max narrowed her eyes at the shorter boy.

“So are you two friends now?” Lucas asked, coming out from behind Dustin.

El smiled at Lucas, “Yes, and I know things about her that you don’t.”

Max’s eyes widened and she immediately slapped a hand over the brunette’s mouth.

El removed the hand from over her mouth and looked up at Mike with a sweet smile, “Mike, what would you do if I said I was a trekkie?”

Max slouched further into the couch cushion, eyes wide as she watched the boys turn to Mike.

“Oh my god,” Dustin whispered, glancing at Mike worriedly. “Dude, I’m so sorry. Wow. I’m... so sorry. Oh my god, look at Max! She’s mortified, too.”

Max chuckled nervously as all eyes landed on her and took this as her cue to get up, silently tip-toeing to the doorway to stand by Lucas.

Mike slowly walked over to the couch and took the seat next to El, taking her hands into his own and looking into her eyes. “El... I...” he began and let out an over-exaggerated, distressful sigh, “I... truly do not care. How do you even know what that is?” He chuckled.

“Hopper,” El smiled and shot a quick look at Max, telling her silently that if Lucas really likes her, he won’t care. Max rolled her eyes in response, but El could see her lips fighting to curve up in a small smile.

“So you’re not secretly a trekkie?” Mike asked, tucking his chin slightly and meeting El’s eyes with his own.

El shook her head, leaning in to meet his gaze, “No, but I could become one. And that would be fine, right?”

“If you were, I’d give it a chance.” Mike promised, only to receive gagging noises and a pillow thrown at his head. He looked at Dustin

in annoyance, “Did you really just walk over here, grab a pillow, and walk all the way back over there to throw it at me?”

“Yes,” Dustin said, tucking his hands into his pockets and shrugging.

“You’re ridiculous,” Lucas narrowed his eyes and shook his head at Dustin, who threw his hands up in surrender.

—

The party stayed at the cabin with El until dinner time, watching some TV before breaking into little groups. Spending time together wasn’t as much about what they did anymore. They found that they just enjoyed each other’s company. Once you can count on someone to beat inter-dimensional monsters for you, I guess it’s easier for them to become somewhat of a safety blanket.

Dustin and Lucas spent most of their time on the floor passionately discussing Star Wars and how fucked up it was that Luke and Leia had turned out to be siblings, even though they’d known for nearly two years now.

“Imagine if one of us had ended up being El’s sibling somehow. Like, I cannot wrap my head around it.” Dustin half-whispered, hands shooting up to his temples.

“Hell, they weren’t even from the same planet and it still happened!” Lucas exclaimed.

Will and Max were at the opposite side of the floor, going over some homework they had for history, a class in which they were partners. They were probably the most level-headed out of the entire group, quizzing each other on important dates and drawing little doodles in the margins of each other’s notes. Max would always cut out and keep Will’s doodles for the collage in the front of her binder, causing him to smile whenever he saw his friend’s pride in him on display.

Mike and El were still sitting close to each other on the couch, going through Mike’s DnD binder. He was trying to teach her how to play the game, and decided to start with how being a DM works.

“I’m usually the dungeon master, which means I plan the campaign

and then help the players navigate the adventures by describing what's going on around them," Mike explained, shifting closer to El. "They choose their characters and stuff, but I plan the adventures they go on. I also choose the monsters, which I usually get from this book," He said, flipping through the monster manual. El nodded, recognizing some of the monsters from previous adventures she'd observed.

The page flipped to a giant red dragon and El put a finger on it with a smile, "I like this one."

Mike wrinkled his nose and read the description, "It's chaotic evil, El."

"Chaotic evil?" She asked, "I don't think he's evil."

He pointed to the alignment on the page, "There are alignments to explain a creature's personality in DnD. The ancient dragon's is chaotic evil, so it's a bad guy."

"Oh. But it's cute." She complained with a frown, finger falling from the page.

"I mean I guess it's possible that you think it's cute. You're chaotic and I think you're cute," Mike shrugged, smirking.

El smacked his arm and glared at him playfully, "Chaotic?"

"Hey, I just called you cute. Are we going to ignore that?" He said, earning him a gentle shove from El who was now almost as red as the ancient dragon.

Mike continued explaining the rules of DnD to El, but she was having a hard time paying attention. Her eyes kept flicking back and forth between the binder and the floor.

El nudged Mike as he was enthusiastically explaining cliché ways to start off an adventure and tilted her head in Lucas and Max's opposite directions. Mike followed the motions of El's head with his eyes and quickly understood what she was trying to tell him. He watched as Max looked at Lucas, who turned away and blushed when he caught her.

Mike's eyes widened as he studied Max and his friend, "Do you think they like each other?"

"I know they do," El's mouth curved into a small smile, "but you can't tell anyone."

Max turned her head to look at Lucas again and instead caught the eyes of Mike and El, who were sitting side by side on the couch with the binder spread over their laps and smiles across their faces in silent understanding. Max could feel the heat of embarrassment burning the tips of her ears and spreading over her cheeks. She was okay with El knowing, but Mike too? She quickly turned her head away from the pairs of eyes observing her and threw a threatening glance at the couple out of the corner of her eye. Mike hurriedly looked back at the binder with wide eyes, but El's lingered, unafraid of her friend. Max raised her eyebrows and began writing something on a sheet of paper before throwing it in El's direction.

The paper landed on top of the binder and Mike chewed on his bottom lip as El picked it up carefully, spreading out the bunched up sheet and laying it down for them both to read.

U guys are like an old annoying couple, it read.

El snickered quietly and Mike smiled, placing the piece of paper in the back of his binder and taking her hand in his own.

Author's Note:

this fic got really long and i didn't expect it honestly??? probably a lot of unnecessary stuff in it but i love the party so it's whatever!!!! also this is my first time ever posting a fic so that's Cool. i can't tell if the ending is abrupt or not but i literally had to stop writing or this would've been 5k words.

fun fact: the sunglasses steve gave max were from his risky business costume cause i love pain!!!!!!

disclaimer: i know the most basic stuff about dnd so ignore anything i say please because it's probably

wrong lol and i didn't go into detail about star trek because i, like el, know nothing about it!!!!!!

next chapter is mike accepting max into the party!! it will probably have a lot more mileven in it because whenever i write them together i accidentally write way too much